

# **RI STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

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**17 Smith Avenue, Greenville, RI 02828**

**949-1480**

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**May 27, 2009**

**9:15 AM**

**USDA NRCS Conference Room**

**Eric Offenberg called the meeting to order at 9:15.**

**In attendance were:**

**E. Offenberg, Chair; Ken Ayars, Eugene Pepper, RI DEM, Agriculture; Kristen Castrataro, URI Co-operative Extension; Norm Hammond, Dick Went, NRICD and RIACD; Paul Dolan, Gina DeMarco, NRICD; Tom Sandham, SRICD; Emerson Wildes, ERICD; Chip Young, Coastal Institute-URI; Ramona LeBlanc, Administrative Assistant.**

### **I. Minutes**

**A motion was made to accept the minutes of the March 26, 2009 meetings: Paul/Ken: unanimous.**

### **II. Financial Report**

**A motion was made to accept the April 30, 2009 financial report:  
Ken/Paul: unanimous.**

### **III. Reports**

**Chair: Eric reported on the progress being made in the development of a restructuring plan in which the office at NRICD would become the administrative center for the Districts. The SCC would become the administrative entity and assume the administrative and overhead costs.**

**The Districts would each maintain their own Board and identity and would be free to pursue any grant opportunities they want. The SCC's emphasis would be on the three core programs previously identified: Education and Outreach, Technical Assistance and FFOS. A preliminary operating budget was presented which indicates a significant savings over present situation. It is expected that the plan should be finalized within a month and, at that point, a promotional campaign to inform the public as well as legislators about the restructuring will be undertaken.**

**NRICD: The Seedling Sale raised about \$4000.00. The Annual Dinner will be held at Addieville East Farm on September 11th. Bowdish Lake and the Smith-Sayles Reservoirs have been chosen in a pilot program to develop management plans to deal with lake invasive in an agreement funded by NRCS. As part of a Wetlands grant funded by DEM a lecture was held at the Audubon Society in Greenville dealing**

with riparian buffers and the issues of natives/invasives. The Scituate Watershed Education Program has been getting very good publicity with several articles and billboards highlighting projects with Scituate High School, the water festival at PWSB, the annual poster contest and eco-friendly landscaping services. A tour of a wildlife habitat restoration project at Joslin Farm was very well attended.

ERICD: Emerson indicated that the Eastern Board has a good understanding of the proposed consolidation of the Districts whereby each District would remain autonomous with administrative control and the freedom to pursue grants/programs without the need for SCC approval.

Gina reported that an Ag Inventory undertaken by NRICD in cooperation with ERICD in Little Compton and Tiverton has been completed. The final report is being prepared.

SRICD: 10 EQIP applications have been submitted and 2 more are in process. Tom has approximately 12 events scheduled for the NRCS Outreach agreement.

URI: A grant proposal for beginning ranchers/farmers has been submitted to NRCS and an equipment bank is being established which, in future, will allow landowners to rent occasionally needed equipment. The URI administration is going through a period of transition.

#### **IV. Old Business**

**A) FFOS:** When the data from the 2007 Ag census are incorporated into the existing formula to determine the recommended values for farm land enrolled in the FFOS program, the rates are dramatically increased. Previously determined Forest values reflect a slight increase and Open Space values remain the same. The concern is that a tax increase combined with the current economy would be detrimental to many farms. The immediate need is to get recommended values to DOA. Ken will conduct a quick comparison with the methods being used in CT and MA. A regional approach can be justified. Once this is completed, the FFOS subcommittee will meet again to discuss. In the long term, a new report to recommend a new formula may be warranted and possibly funded by the van Beuren Foundation grant.

A small working group has been formed to develop guidelines and minimum standards DEM will accept for conservation plans for farm applications to FFOS. A draft is out for review and a meeting is scheduled for the week of 6/8 to finalize the guidelines.

**B) van Beuren Grant:** It is expected that the van Beuren Foundation will formally accept the grant proposal very soon.

**C) RI Foundation Grant:** Chip is planning meetings with each District Board in which he, Eric, Dick and Ramona will discuss details of how the consolidation process might work and to present financial templates that will be used by everyone. Each District must be comfortable with their own autonomy, how funds will be managed and allocated. A centralized operating budget must be acceptable to all Districts. An interim report will be submitted to RI Foundation after

these meetings. Later, a larger grant may be sought to develop a PR strategy for the Districts.

Chip emphasized that communications between the Districts is very important. He also indicated that he could advocate for the Districts with various groups throughout the state if he is kept informed of Districts' activities.

An opportunity to do Education and Outreach in the HAP watershed in Southern District will serve as a pilot of how to administer a program on a statewide basis, if obtained.

## **V. New Business**

**A. Annual Report:** The enabling legislation that forms the SCC specifies that annual reports must be submitted by each District to the SCC 90 days after the end of the fiscal year. The SCC, in turn, must include those in its own report which must be made available to legislators and various State officers and officials. It was suggested that developing these required reports into a slightly more elaborate format than has been used in the past might replace the printing of individual annual reports by each District. Further since SRICD and ERICD don't have the funds to print their own reports, a single report might be more equitable. It would be up to individual Boards to decide if they want to print their own report.

## **VI. Other**

**Tom asked for advised on a possible conflict of interest. He has purchased a no-till seeder which he would like to make available to farmers throughout the State. Eventually, he will turn it over the URI's equipment bank. In the meantime, it was advised that he could provide the service of the tiller but not to farms for which he is developing conservation plans.**

**Meeting adjourned at 10:45.**